AN

ANSWER

To all the

Excuſes and Pretences

Which Men ordinarily make for their not coming to the

Holy Communion.

To which is added,

A Brief Account of the End and Deſign of the Holy Communion, the Obligation to receive It; the Way to prepare for It; and the Behaviour of our ſelves both At, and After It.

Fitted for the meaneſt Capacities, and very proper to be given away by ſuch as are Charitably Inclined. *Price* 3 *pence.*

By a Divine of the Church of England.

The Sixth Edition Corrected.

LONDON:

Printed for R. SARE at *Grays-Inn-Gate* in *Holborn*, MDCC.

To the Reader.

If thou haſt receiv'd any Satisfaction or Benefit by this Little Book, Lend it to thy Neighbour for his Good.

An Anſwer to all the Excuses and Pretences which Men ordinarily make for their not coming to the Holy Communion.

A Certain Man made a great Supper and bad many; And ſent his Servant at Supper-time, to ſay to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready. And they all with one conſent began TO MAKE EXCUSE: Luk. 16. &c. The deſign of this Parable is to repreſent the manner of God's dealing with the People of the Jews, upon their rejecting the Faith of Chriſt and refuſing to embrace the Goſpel. The Apoſtles of Chriſt, who were the Servants of God, were ſent and commanded, in the firſt place, to Preach the glad tidings of the Goſpel to them; and to invite them to come and partake of that Bleſſing and Happineſs, which was offered them by God, through Faith in, and Obedience unto his Son Chriſt *Jeſus*. But they, generally having their hearts, wholly in a manner addicted to the Love of this World, had no Inclination to receive ſo pure and Spiritual an Inſtitution; and did not only themſelves reject, but alſo perſecuted others for embracing the Chriſtian Profeſſion; deſpiſing and *treading under foot the Son of God, and counting the Blood of the Covenant*, wherewith they ſhould have been *Sanctified, an unholy thing; and* even *doing deſpight unto the Spirit of Grace*, which

would have wrought upon their hearts in order to their Converſion. As therefore the Man in this Parable, who made the Supper, was offended with thoſe who did not come when they were Invited; and therefore wholly Excluded them from his Table; and ſent his Servant to call others in their room (as you may find it in the latter part of it:) So did Almighty God caſt off the People of the Jews, upon their obſtinate rejecting of *Jeſus* Chriſt; giveing them up to be deſtroyed and ſcattered by the power of the *Romans*; And Commanded the Apoſtles to go out into all parts of the World, to gather a Church and a peculiar People, unto him from among the Gentiles. But my preſent aim in Reflecting upon this Parable, lies clear another way; namely, to repreſent, and reprove, thoſe *Excuſes* and *Pretences*, which ſo many men do make, for their groſs neglect of the *Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Chriſt*, notwithſtanding that God, by the Mouth of his Miniſters, does ſo frequently call, and earneſtly invite them thereunto. And indeed this matter is, in ſo lively a manner, repreſented in the whole deſign of it, that I think it is ſcarce poſſible to draw a more exact Parallel.

For here, in the firſt place, we have Almighty God making a Supper for us; for the feeding and nouriſhing of our Souls, in Virtue and Piety, through the Paſſion, and Death, of our Saviour Chriſt *Jeſus*, which he has appointed for ever to be commemorated by our eating of this Bread and Drinking of this Cup in Remembrance of him. To this Supper we are, not once only, but often, bidden; by the frequent Admonitions and Exhortations of God's Miniſters addreſſed unto us, that we ſhould come and be partakers of this Holy Communion: And as the Gueſts who were invited in this Parable had framed ſome weak and impertinent excuſes, for their

not

not coming; One *had bought a piece of Ground*, another *five yoke of Oxen*, and a third had *Married a Wife*; none of which things needed to have hindered them from accepting of the good Man's kindneſs. Juſt ſo we, when from Month to Month, and from Year to Year, we continually turn our backs upon God's Holy Table; have yet ſome ſort of pretences wherewith we endeavour to ſatisfie our Conſciences, and to excuſe this groſs and ſcandalous neglect of which we are Guilty.

That our Saviour Chriſt *Jeſus* Died for our Sins; that it is only for the ſake of his Merits and Sufferings, that we can hope for Pardon and Eternal Life at the hand of God; That, before his Death, he left this command with all that ſhould be call'd by his Name, that they ſhould *Eat of this Bread and Drink of this Cup in remembrance of him*; whereby we are oblig'd to ſhew forth his Death until his ſecond coming: and laſtly, that this Ordinance is the *Communion* of the *Body* and *Blood of Chriſt*; or, in other terms, the means whereby we do Communicate in the Benefits of that Sacrifice, which Chriſt offered, and in the merits of that Death and Paſſion, which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the ſhedding of his *Blood* for us; and, conſequently, that the receiving hereof, if duly perform'd is not only our duty, but alſo a great advantage and benefit unto us; All theſe things I ſay, are ſo univerſally owned by all who profeſs Chriſtianity, that I need not offer any thing for the proof of them, or any part of them. But then ſurely one would think that when men, who are thus perſwaded do ſo often, and for ſo long a time abſent themſelves from this ordinance, there muſt be ſome inſuperable difficulties, and obſtacles in their way, which is beyond their ſtrength or power to remove; or elſe that they would never, at the ſame time, both neglect their Duty, and forego their In-

tereſt. And yet I doubt not but to make it appear, as plainly as any thing can be, that there is nothing which we can, at any time, pretend as a hindrance of our coming to the Holy Communion; But what either is really, or ought to be, no hinderance at all; or elſe is ſuch as it is in our power, by that Grace and Aſſiſtance which God never denies to thoſe who ſeek it, wholly to remove and put out of the way.

To come to the Matter then, and that I may proceed in an orderly Method; I ſhall reduce all the Impediments, which Men do ever alledge for their not coming unto the holy Communion, to theſe Five Heads: that is to ſay, either, *Firſt*, that they are Sinners, and therefore dare not come; or *Secondly*, That they are ſo continually engaged, and taken up with Buſineſs, that they have not time to prepare themſelves for it; or *Thirdly*, That when they do endeavour to prepare themſelves, they find they cannot do it, as it ought to be done; or, *Fourthly*, That having formerly received the Communion, they find themſelves never the better for it, and therefore think it to no purpoſe to come again; or, *Laſtly*, That they are not well ſatisfied with the manner of Celebrating, Adminiſtring, and Receiving this Ordinance in our Church, and therefore cannot joyn with our Congregations in it: Nor is there, I think, any Thing that can be urged by way of Excuſe for not coming to the Holy Communion, but what I ſhall fairly examine, and I hope effectually confute, under ſome one or other of theſe Particulars.

1. Then ſome men may ſay, that they are great Sinners, and therefore, upon that account, dare not come to the Holy Communion, for fear leaſt they ſhould be unworthy Receivers, and ſo, inſtead of obtaining any Benefit thereby, ſhould only *Eat and Drink their own Damnation.*

To

To this I anſwer, that if a Man lies under the guilt of any Sin, and does not repent of it, and Heartily reſolve to forſake and amend it; it is indeed a Preſumption and a Sin for ſuch a Perſon, whilſt he continues in that State, to come to the Communion. But then I muſt tell him alſo, that not only his coming to the Holy Communion, but even his very *Prayers* are an *Abomination* to God. *Prov.* 28. 9. For what is it elſe but a perfect Affront, and even a Mocking of the Divine Majeſty, for a Man to make a ſhew of Worſhip and Honour to him, whilſt, at the ſame time, he goes on in wilful diſobedience to his known Commands? which I wiſh were well and ſeriouſly conſidered by thoſe Men, who make no ſcruple of addreſſing themſelves to God in Prayer, whilſt, by reaſon of their Sins, of which they have not repented, they dare not approach unto this Holy Table.

But whatever Sins a Man has been Guilty of in times paſt, if he truly repents of them, and Heartily forſakes them for the time to come; God has ſo often and ſo plainly promis'd in this Caſe, to grant a full and free Pardon of them, that they cannot juſtly be pretended as any obſtacle, which ſhould hinder us from approaching to him in any of his Ordinances.

Since then it is in the Power of every Man (at leaſt of every one who by a long courſe of Wickedneſs has not provoked God wholly to withdraw his Grace from him) by that Grace and Aſſiſtance, which God continually offers unto us, to repent of his Sins, and amend his Life: If ſuch a Man looks upon his Sins as a Bar between him and the Holy Communion; yet it is plainly ſuch a Bar as is in his Power to remove, and therefore can never juſtly be pleaded as an Excuſe in his behalf.

But ſome Men perhaps may ſay, that though he ſhould beg God's pardon for his Sins paſt, and ſincere-

ly resolve to forsake them; yet he fears that being frail, he may sometime or other be prevailed on by his own Weakness or the Strength of a Temptation, to break those Resolutions which he made, and return again to his Sins. And if this should ever be the Case with him, he doubts whether God would ever again admit him to Pardon and Reconciliation. And therefore he thinks it safer to abstain from the Holy Communion, rather then to run the hazard of being for ever excluded from the Hopes of Heaven.

In answer to this I shall offer these Three Things.

First, Altho' a Man does plainly foresee, that hereafter he shall be most likely sometimes to fall into some Sins of Frailty and Infirmity, (such as a hasty Word or a suddain and unadvised Action) yet this ought not to hinder him from coming to the Holy Communion: For as St. *James* tells us, that, *In many things we offend all*, *Ja.* 3. 2. So is there not any Man upon the face of the Earth, who can be absolutely sure that he shall always hereafter keep himself free from all manner of Sin whatsoever. On the contrary as there is no Man but what has his share more or less, of human infirmities, so is it most reasonable to conclude, that, in the course of his Life, these will sometimes unavoidably surprize and betray him into some Sins. Against these our Infirmities, therefore, we must continually strive: And we may reasonable hope, that, by God's Grace, and our own diligent and careful Endeavours, we may every day more and more prevail against them: But if this were a good Reason for abstaining from the Holy Communion, because a Man cannot, at once, get a full and perfect Victory over them; I cannot see how, even the best of Men, (who cannot pretend to absolute Perfection,) could safely venture

venture to partake of it: And conſequently, this would be the way wholly to lay aſide, and aboliſh the very Ordinance it ſelf.

Secondly, But as for willful and deliberate Sins, or returning again unto an habitual courſe of wickedneſs; there is no man but, by the Grace of God, and his own endeavours, may, if he pleaſes, for ever ſecure himſelf againſt it. For however God may think it fit, for our greater humility, and a farther trial of us, to leave us ſtill expoſed to ſome of the common infirmities of our Nature; yet, in reſpect of all habitual or deliberate Sins, we may aſſure our ſelves that *he is faithful, and will not ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that we may* (if it be not our own fault) *be able to bear it*, 1 Cor. 10. 13. Nor will he fail to *draw nigh unto us*, whil'ſt we continue careful to *draw nigh unto him*, *Jam.* 4. 8. Let us then but ſtedfaſtly reſolve, that we will be hearty and induſtrious, in doing what lies in our own Power; and we need not be diſcouraged by any ſuch fears as theſe, as long as we are ſecure that God will never let us want his aſſiſtance.

But *Thirdly*, Let us put the Caſe as bad as may be; that after a ſerious Repentance, and moſt ſtedfaſt Reſolutions of Amendment, ratified and confirmed by the reception of the Holy Communion; a Man ſhould be ſo far prevailed upon by the temptations of the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, as to return again to his former Wickedneſs, in as high or a higher Degree than before; Yet even in this caſe we cannot conclude that ſuch a perſon is for ever excluded by God from all poſſibility of Pardon and Reconciliation. There are indeed ſome paſſages of Scripture, that do repreſent the Condition of ſuch an one, to be very dreadful and dangerous: As *Heb.* 6. 4, 5, 6. and Chap. 10. 26, 27. 2 *Pet.* 2. 20, 21. But if, on the

the other ſide, we conſider how often, and how highly, the Mercy of God is ſet forth and magnified, even towards the greateſt Sinners, upon their true repentance, that *he has no pleaſure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and Live*, Ezek. 33. 11. that *he is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to Repentance*, 2 Pet. 3. 9. *that tho' our Sins be as Scarlet, or as Red as Crimſin*, yet God is ready, upon our Repentance, to make them *as white as Wool or Snow*, Iſai. 1. 18. From theſe and many ſuch paſſages of Scripture I think we may well gather, that if the moſt profligate and Relapſed Sinner, does even after a long time, come at laſt to ſuch a ſenſe of his own Condition as throughly to *turn from the Wickedneſs that he hath committed*, and to Live the remainder of his days in the practice of Virtue and good Works, *doing that which is lawful and right*, and notwithſtanding all his failures, yet at laſt continues and Perſeveres therein, that even ſuch a Perſon as this *ſhall ſave his Soul alive*, Ezek. 18. 27. Altho' at the ſame time, it ſtands with a great deal of Reaſon, that the greater a Man's Sins have been, and the oftner he has relapſed into them, the deeper his Sorrow, and the more laborious his Repentance muſt be, in order to obtain his Pardon. But ſince a poſſibility of Pardon there is, even in this caſe it ſelf; we muſt not make the contrary fear a pretence for keeping our ſelves back from any of the Ordinances of God, and from a more immediate and intimate Communion with him.

And thus much for the firſt Impediment.

But Secondly, Some Men pretend that they are ſo continually engaged, and taken up with Buſineſs, that they have not time to prepare themſelves for the Holy Communion, and therefore do not come to it.

To

To ſuch Men as theſe I anſwer, That this Buſineſs which they pretend, is either Lawful Buſineſs or Unlawful: If it be Unlawlul buſineſs, and ſuch as cannot be followed with a good Conſcience, it muſt be renounced and wholly laid aſide: And to plead this as a reaſon for not coming to the Holy Communion, is altogether to aggravate, inſtead of to excuſe, our neglect. But if the Buſineſs be it ſelf Lawful, and followed in a Lawful way; if it neither contains, nor engages us in, any thing, which is Diſhoneſt, or any way contrary to the Law of God; ſuch Buſineſs as this is ſo far from unqualifying a Man, that really it rather renders him the more fit to Receive the Holy Communion. For as Idleneſs is it ſelf a Sin, and the Mother, or at leaſt the Nurſe, of all manner of Wickedneſs; ſo Honeſt and Lawful buſineſs is a Duty which every Man is obliged to be diligent in, 1 *Theſſ.* 4. 11. *Eph.* 4. 28. And certainly the performance of a Man's duty will never render him the leſs Acceptable to God, or unfit to draw near unto him in this or any other of his Ordinances.

But there is one particular ſort of Buſineſs, in which ſome Men think that whil'ſt they are engaged, they cannot be well prepared for the Holy Communion; and that is a Law-Suit. But to this the very ſame Anſwer muſt be given that is already returned to the pretence of Buſineſs in general. If a man engages in a Suit of Law, with a deſign to wrong or defraud, another; If in the management of it he has recourſe to any Baſe and wicked Arts or contrivances; If, not contented fairly to try the Merits of the Cauſe, he ſtrives, by all the ways, to caſt Perſonal Reflections upon his Adverſary; or, in a word, if herein he proceeds in ſuch a way as is contrary either to Juſtice or Charity; ſuch a Law-Suit as this, I confeſs, renders a Man altogether unfit to approach unto God in any way whatſoever; not only whil'ſt he is engaged in

it,

it, but also until he has made Restitution, and satisfaction, to the best of his Power, for all the Wrong that he has thereby done unto his Neighbour. But then why will any Man who pretends to Christianity, engage in such a matter as this; which is contrary to common Honesty and a good Conscience? Or if Unadvisedly he has engaged himself, before he knew what he did; Why does he not withdraw and forbear to Prosecute an unjust Cause, or a just one in an unjust way? Why does not he make Satisfaction to his Neighbour, if he has done him any wrong; And how can he think to plead that as an excuse for not coming to God's Holy Table, which it is in his Power to lay aside and to Remedy whenever he pleases.

But on the other side, if he designs no more but fairly to make use of the Law of the Land, and the power of the Magistrate (who is ordained of God) either to Defend, or Recover, what in Conscience he is verily perswaded is his just and Lawful Right; if in the management of his Business he proceeds Honestly, and without any Fraud or juggle; And lastly if he bears no Malice, nor offers any way to vent his Spleen against the Person of his Adversary, but is always free and ready to do him any reasonable office of Kindness or Friendship; In such a Law-Suit as this there is nothing which is contrary to the Duty of a Christian, nor consequently any thing which needs be in the least, a Hinderance to his coming to the Holy Communion.

But some perhaps will say that altho' there is nothing Sinful or Unlawful either in the Business they are about, or in their way of managing or following it; yet their time is so wholly taken up thereby, that they have not leisure for the Performance of those solemn, and Particular Devotions, which are necessary in order to their due Preparation. Nay such may

may be the condition of ſome, that have not, it may be, ſo much as a place of retirement for their private Devotions (which may be the caſe of many Servants and private Souldiers, and ſuch like) and how can they prepare themſelves as they ought, or how ſhall they venture to come if they are not ſo prepared?

To this I anſwer, that it is a miſtake, which ſome well-meaning Men have entertained, that they think they muſt not venture to Receive the Holy Communion except they ſay ſo many Prayers, and ſpend ſo many hours in retirement and meditation, for ſome days immediately before the Celebration of it. Where a man indeed is at his own Command, and Maſter of his own time; he is much to be approved of and commended, if, upon ſuch an Occaſion as this, he ſpends more hours, than at other times, in private Prayers, Reading and Meditation; that he may *trim his Lamp* before he goes *to meet the Bridegroom*; and cleanſe and Adorn his *Wedding-garment*, before he comes to the Marriage Feaſt. But where the Publick ſervice of a Man's Country, or the Private neceſſities of himſelf or his Family, do engage him in ſo much Buſineſs as that he has not ſuch leiſure for Retirement; If in the midſt of his affairs, he ever takes care to have God in his thoughts, and often to lift up his Heart to him by private Ejaculations; and when he has neither Chamber nor Cloſet, Garden nor Field to withdraw himſelf into, if he but ſeriouſly retires into his own thoughts (which a Man may do in any place; upon his bed at midnight, and even in the midſt of the greateſt Croud in the day time) and there enquires into his Paſt Sins, and renews his Reſolutions of Amendment; and if all this proceeds from an *honeſt and well meaning Heart* truly and affectionately diſpoſed, to the ſervice of God, and the practice of Piety; no doubt but it ſhall be as well accepted

accepted by God, as the more ſolemn Devotions of thoſe, who have better opportunity for ſuch performances.

And thus much for the Second Impediment.

Thirdly, Some pretend that when they do endeavour to prepare themſelves for the Holy Communion, they find they cannot do it as it ought to be done, and therefore they do not come: To the ſeveral Scruples of which ſort of Men, I ſhall return brief and diſtinct Anſwers.

Some then do apprehend, that they are not fit to come, becauſe they are Ignorant, and not well grounded and inſtructed in the Principles of Religion.

To this I anſwer, that indeed, if a Man be Ignorant of thoſe things which are ordinarily neceſſary to the Salvation of every Chriſtian; it is evidently not fit that he ſhould come to the Holy Communion, until ſuch time as he be better inſtructed. But ſuch Inſtructions as this, is ſo eaſy to be had (at leaſt amongſt us) that it muſt be every Man's own fault if he wants it. For how eaſy is it for every Man, who either reads the Scripture, or hears it read and Expounded in our Congregations, ſufficiently to learn all the great and neceſſary things of the Chriſtian Religion? As for Example, that God Created all things; that *Jeſus* Chriſt is the Son of God, that he came into the World and took our Nature upon him, to ſuffer for our Redemption; that, after he had Suffered, he roſe again from the Dead, and Aſcended into Heaven, where he remains for ever in the Glory and Majeſty of God, making Eternal Inrerceſſion for us; and that he ſhall come again at the end of the World to Judge both the living and the dead; (who ſhall at that time be raiſed again) and to ſentence every man either to Everlaſting Happineſs or Eternal Miſery: That every Chriſtian is to be admitted into the Church by Baptiſm; that it is his Duty to live Soberly

ly, Righteouſly, and Godly, in this preſent World; and that it is by the aſſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt, who is the giver of Spiritual life unto us, that we are alone enabled to perform theſe Duties. And laſtly, that, in remembrance of the Death and Paſſion of our Saviour *Jeſus* Chriſt, we are Commanded to Eat of that Bread, and Drink of that Cup, which he has appointed; and which is the Communion of his Body and Blood, that is to ſay, the means whereby we do communicate in the Benefits of the Sacrifice which he offered, and in the merits of his Paſſion, which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the ſhedding of his *Blood* for our ſakes, as I have already ſaid. All this, I ſay, is ſo eaſy to be learnt and underſtood, that it is a great ſhame for any one who lives in a Chriſtian Country to be Ignorant of any part of it. And he who is thus far Inſtructed in his Religion; and endeavours, according to his ability, to increaſe his knowledge of Divine things; and hereunto adds the Honeſt and Sincere Practiſe of what he underſtands; needs never fear that God will reject him for want of more knowledge. For altho, we muſt, according to our Capacity, *add to our Virtue, Knowledge*; yet it is not abundance of Knowledge, but much Honeſty, Charity, and true Piety, that renders us acceptable and pleaſing to God: See 1 *Cor.* 1, 19. to the 7*th.* verſe of the 2*d.* Chapter.

Again, Some do find their Faith to be weak and wavering, and perplext with doubts, and ſcruples, in matters of Religion; and therefore are afraid to come.

To this I anſwer, That indeed the ſtronger and firmer a Man's Faith is, ſo much the better; and we ought to endeavour, as much as in us lies, that our Faith may ever be built upon ſure and ſolid Principles, as well for our own comfort and ſatisfaction, as that we may be the better able, upon Occaſion,

ſion, to *give an Anſwer to every one who ſhall ask us a Reaſon of the hope that is in us*, 1. Pet. 3. 15. But when a Man has done what he can to ſtrengthen and confirm his Faith, if it ſtill continues infirm and weak, yet if he be Honeſt and Pious, in his Life and Practiſe; he is nevertheleſs acceptable to God for the weakneſs of his Faith. For ſtrength of Faith is not a thing in our Power; and therefore not ſo much a Duty in us, as a Reward which God is pleaſed to beſtow, in ſuch a meaſure as he thinks fit, upon thoſe who are ſincere and diligent in his Service: And *he that is weak in the Faith*, may yet be a very good Chriſtian; and fit to be Receiv'd into the Church of Chriſt; altho' he be not qualified for *doubtful Diſputations*, Rom. 14. 1. As long as a Tree continues to bring forth plenty of Fruit, we are ſure it is alive, nor do we preſently cut it down and caſt it into the Fire, becauſe it is not altogether ſo well fixed at the root, and therefore, it may be ſubject to be ſhaken by the violence of the Wind: And the weakeſt Faith, if it produces abundance of Good Works, ſhall be accepted by God, when the ſtrongeſt Faith, if barren and unfruitful, ſhall be rejected and ſet at nought by him. See *Jam.* 2. 14. *&c.* Whenever therefore an honeſt and well diſpoſed Man finds his Faith to be any way weak and wavering, let him take up the good Man's Speech in the Goſpel, *Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief*, *Mar.* 9. 24. And let him never fear but that, God who is infinitely gracious and merciful will accept of him.

Some, again are afraid that they do not love God as well as they ought; and the reaſon of this fear is, becauſe they do not find in themſelves ſuch warm and affectionate Motions of their Minds towards him, as they apprehend to be ſutable to his infinite excellency and goodneſs: And for this reaſon they dare not venture to come,

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To this I anſwer, that, indeed, the more Ardent and Affectionate our love to God is, ſo much the better is that, as well as our Faith, for being ſtrong and unſhaken. But as our Faith is to be judged of by its Fruitfulneſs rather than its Firmneſs (as I have juſt now ſhewn) ſo the Holy Scripture teaches us, That the *Love of God* conſiſts altogether in *Keeping his Commandments*, 1 Joh. 5. 3. Some people are Naturally of ſuch a Temper, as more eaſily to be moved with a Paſſionate Affection toward thoſe they Love than others are: And yet others, who do not find ſuch warm Motions within themſelves, may be as ready and willing as they, to do acts of Kindneſs where they profeſs a Friendſhip. Nor is the Love of the latter ſort ever the leſs to be Valued, becauſe it appears to be Seated and Fixed more in the Judgment and Will, which are ſubject to leſs alteration than the Affections: As the true love of a Wife to her Husband, is to be meaſur'd by her readineſs to obey and pleaſe him in all Things, much rather than by the fondneſs which ſhe expreſſes to his Perſon. If therefore a Man finds himſelf ſtedfaſtly reſolved, *with full purpoſe of Heart, to cleave unto God*, and upon all Occaſions to do what he Commands; ever preferring the pleaſing of him before any, or all, the Honours, Profits, or Pleaſures of this World; he may aſſure himſelf that he is a real and true Lover of God; nor need he abſent himſelf from the Holy Communion, for want of that Ardency and Livelineſs of Affection to God which the very beſt of Men perhaps do oftener wiſh for than enjoy or find within themſelves.

Others there are who Fear they are not in perfect Charity with all the World: They have ſometimes had to do with Men of Baſe and Unjuſt Dealings, who have broken their Promiſes, and it may be, their Oaths; and thereby betray'd them who have

depended on them; or have otherwiſe been Guilty of wicked and unworthy Practices. And altho', in Obedience to God's Commands, they would not do any thing by way of Revenge, even againſt theſe very Men; yet as often as they ſee them, or do but think of them, they find their very Blood to riſe againſt them, and cannot poſſibly Suppreſs that Anger, and Indignation, which ſprings up in their Minds againſt ſuch Perſons; and therefore they Fear that their Charity is Defective, and ſo dare not come to the Holy Communion.

To this I anſwer, That our Charity towards Man, as well as our Love to God, is to be meaſur'd by the Purpoſes and Reſolutions of our Will, and our Actions conſequent thereto; and not by the ſuddain Motions of our Paſſions and Affections: Which in the caſe above mentioned, may be ſcarcely ſo much in our Power, as wholly to be Conquered and Stifled by us. But whatever Paſſionate Reſentments may force themſelves into our Minds upon ſuch Occaſions as theſe; if we do not ſuffer them to break out into Bitter and Reproachful Expreſſions, or Malicious and Revengeful Actions: And if in Spite of our Anger we do firmly reſolve, in Obedience to God's Command, to return Good, and not Evil, for Evil: In a Word, if, as St. *Paul* directs us, when we are *Angry*, we take care and watch over our ſelves that we *Sin not*, *Eph.* 4. 26. (which is certainly in our Power, through the Grace of God and our own Endeavours,) we need not fear that any ſuch inward Motions of our Paſſions, as we cannot wholly ſuppreſs, but yet do not ſuffer to break out into any Sinful Words or Actions, ſhall ever be imputed to us as a Breach of Charity.

Others again are afraid that they are not ſorrowful enough for the Sins which they have Committed, becauſe they do not find their Grief ſo quick and pungent

pungent as they think it ought to be; nor ſtrong enough even ſo much as to bring a Tear from their Eyes; and therefore they dare not venture to come.

To this I anſwer, That true it is, indeed, that we can never grieve too much for our Sins, whereby we have offended our good and gracious God: And if even *Rivers of Tears* could run down our Eyes, on this Occaſion, they would all be but little enough But yet, after all; our Sorrow for Sin, is not to be meaſured by the Paſſionateneſs of it, which is ſoon over; or the Tears it produces, which are as ſoon dried up; but is altogether to be eſtimated by the Amendment which it cauſes in our Lives. It is a never-failing Rule which St. *Paul* gives us to know *Godly Sorrow* by, which is, that it *worketh Repentance*, 1 *Cor.* 7. 10. If then a Man has ſo true and ſerious a Senſe of his Sins, as that it brings him to Repentance, that is to ſay, to a thorough and laſting Reformation of his Life; this Sorrow, tho' it never affects him in a Paſſionate way, or draws any Tears at all from his Eyes; yet is certainly true godly Sorrow, and ſuch as ſhall be accepted by God; becauſe it worketh Repentance, which is the only End for which godly Sorrow is either required or valued.

Others yet again there are who complain, that when they would ſet themſelves to prepare for the Holy Communion, they in a little time grow ſo tired with the length of thoſe Devotions which are thereunto required, that they are not able to accompliſh what they propos'd. And when they would even *force* themſelves to continue their Prayers and Meditations, they cannot, with all their care, keep their Minds fixed, and attentive upon what they are about; but their Thoughts will unavoidably wander upon other things that are Idle and Impertinent. And this they apprehend to be the Sin of *drawing near to God with their Mouths, and Honouring him with their*

Lips, when their Heart is far from him, Isai. 29. 13. And therefore They dare not come unto his Holy Table.

To this I answer, That whenever we address our selves unto God in Prayer, we ought certainly to use our utmost endeavours so to fix and compose our Minds, as that our thoughts may not wander and go astray, if we can possibly hinder them.

And he who pretends to Pray with his Lips, and does not withall strive that his Heart and Mind may be devoutly affected, is undoubtedly guilty of a great slight put upon the Majesty of God; and may justly be taxed with some part of that Sin which I but just now made mention of. But when a Man has done the best he can to fix his Thoughts, and to keep his Mind from Wandring in Prayer; If after all this, Idle and Impertinent Imaginations, do, against his Will, croud themselves upon him; and like Flies, tho' continually beaten off, yet still return again and molest him; In this Case he may well Assure himself that God who is Gracious and Merciful, will never impute that to him as a Sin, which, with all his endeavours, he cannot help: But it shall only be reckoned upon the score of his Infirmities, against which indeed he must ever strive; but it may be shall never be able wholly to Conquer them as long as he Lives.

But there is one piece of Advice which I think very proper to offer unto those that are in these Circumstances; which is, that they should comprise their private Devotions in as few Words as conveniently they can; and then they will neither be so apt to be tired, nor their Thoughts to wander therein, as when they are drawn out to a greater length. It is not *much Speaking* that makes our Prayers the more acceptable to God, or the sooner heard by him, *Mat.* 6. 7. And it is easy to comprehend all, that is ordi-

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narily neceſſary to be ſaid in Prayer, in a few Words. The Lord's Prayer is but ſhort; and yet very full; and certainly a Form moſt acceptable to God. The Publicans *God be merciful to me a Sinner*, Luk. 18. 13. was as well received, coming from a ſincere and honeſt Heart, as if he had made his Confeſſion in more words. And there is no manner of doubt but that ſhort and devout Ejaculations, frequently offered up to God, by a truly pious Soul, ſhall effectually prevail at the Throne of Grace, when they come from ſuch a Perſon, as by reaſon of his natural Frailty and Infirmity, is not ſo well able to make longer Prayers.

Again, Some there are who are given to Mirth and Company-keeping; and know not how well to become ſerious, and reſerved enough, to be fit for the Holy Communion, and therefore they do not come.

I anſwer, That a Chearful and Pleaſant Diſpoſition is ſo far from being unlawful, or any way diſpleaſing to God; that, on the contrary, where it is rightly managed, and kept within due Bounds, it is commonly very ſerviceable to the promoting of Peace and Love in the World, which is one of the great Ends of Chriſtian Religion. Let then a Man but take *ſtrict* care, that his Mirth be not ſinful in its ſelf, nor inſtrumental to promote Wickedneſs in the World: Let him not droll upon Religion and Piety, nor *make a mock at Sin:* Let no Jeſt that is bitter or ſarcaſtical, or tends to the diſcredit or undervaluing of his Neighbour, or which is any way profane, filthy, or obſcene, come forth of his Lips; nor let him ſhew any manner of Delight or Satisfaction when ſuch Things are vented by others: Let him abſtain from all debauched Songs or Stories, which ſeem to be contrived on purpoſe to corrupt the World: And let him never promote, but always, as much as he can, diſcountenance all manner of Rioting, Drunkenneſs,

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Lewdneſs and Profaneneſs: In a word, let him be ſure that his Mirth betrays neither himſelf, nor others, to any thing which is contrary to Piety, Charity or Sobriety; And as long as he keeps himſelf within ſuch Bounds as theſe (which is plainly very poſſible to every Man who will heartily reſolve it) he needs not fear that a chearful, and facetious Behaviour, will render him ever the worſe a Chriſtian, or the leſs fit to receive the Holy Communion.

And laſt of all (that I may conclude what I have to ſay under this Head) ſome there are who having met with many Croſſes and Afflictions in the World, have their Minds ſo diſcompoſed, and their Thoughts diſtracted with Care, Grief, or Trouble, that they cannot ſettle their Minds, as they think they ought, for the Holy Communion; and therefore they do not come to it.

To this I anſwer, That if any Trouble or Affliction provokes a Man to Impatience, and prevails ſo far as to make him Murmur and Repine againſt the Providence of God; this, indeed, is a Sin, and muſt, and may, as all other Sins, be repented of, as I have already ſaid, under the firſt Head of this Diſcourſe. But if there be no more in it than this, that the croſſes and vexations under which a Man lies, do ſo diſcompoſe his Mind, as that he cannot keep his Thoughts from wandering when he is at his Devotion; to this Caſe I have but juſt now ſpoken, and need not repeat what I have ſaid upon it.

And thus I have at laſt done with the Third Impediment; upon which I have been forced the longer to dwell, becauſe of the many Scruples, and Objections, which it affords.

I ſhall need to ſpeak but a Word or Two, to the Fourth Impediment, which ſome Men pretend; namely that, having formerly received the Holy Communion, they find themſelves never the better

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for it; and therefore think it to no purpoſe to come again.

To which I anſwer, That if a Man reaps no Benefit by the Reception of the Holy Communion, the fault is altogether his own; becauſe either he does not duly prepare himſelf for it, or elſe does not receive it ſo often as he ſhould. Some Bodies are ſo diſtempered, and Stomachs vitiated, that they turn the beſt Food into corrupt and evil Nouriſhment: And if a Man of the moſt healthy Conſtitution ſhould eat but one Meal in a Week, it would never keep him in health and ſtrength. But let the Stomach be cleanſed, and the Body brought into good order, and then let the Man eat his conſtant and daily Meals, and he ſhall find both his Health and Strength encreaſe upon him. And the Caſe is juſt the ſame with this Spiritual Food, which is exhibited to us in the Holy Sacrament. Whilſt the Soul is polluted and diſtempered with Sins unrepented of, it will certainly rather do us hurt than good to receive it: And when Men partake of it but once in a Year or Two, or, it may be not ſo often; whatever Strength or Refreſhment their Souls begin to find thereby, is loſt and forgot before it comes again to be renewed by the ſame Ordinance. But let a Man throughly cleanſe and purge his Soul from Sin by a ſincere Repentance; and with an honeſt Heart, and Mind well prepared, let him come as often as he can to God's Holy Table; and by the frequent and conſtant uſe of this Holy Sacrament, he need not doubt but he ſhall find himſelf continually to grow more and more in Grace; becoming ſtill better and better enabled to reſiſt all Temptations, and daily find more and more quiet, and comfort in his Mind and Conſcience.

And thus much for the Fourth Impediment.

I come now in the Laſt place of all, to ſpeak a word or two to thoſe who are not well ſatisfied with the

the manner of celebrating the Holy Communion in our Church, and therefore will not joyn with our Congregations, in it.

Two things there are, which are chiefly objected againſt us in this caſe: One that we make uſe of ſuch Ceremonies as they cannot comply with; and in particular, that the Holy Communion is amongſt us to be received in the poſture of Kneeling: And the other is, that we adminiſter it to a mixt Congregation, without a ſtrict enquiry into the qualifications of all thoſe who are admitted to it.

To the firſt of theſe I anſwer, that no Man can ſay that either Kneeling at the Holy Communion, or any other of the Rites or Ceremonies which we uſe at the celebration of it, are Sinful and unlawful; becauſe it does not appear that God has any where *Forbid* them. The utmoſt then that they can pretend, is only that they are improper, and inconvenient. Now, beſides that others, who may be as good Judges, are of a different opinion; I would deſire to know whether ſuch things as are not Sinful, but only improper and inconvenient, can be a ſufficient warrant to any Man to ſeparate himſelf from the Communion of an Orthodox, Eſtabliſhed Church? If not; then they have no juſt reaſon upon this account to ſeparate from us. But if they be, then I would farther demand, which is the greateſt inconveniency, to kneel at the Communion, or to make a Schiſm in the Church? And of the two inconveniences whether we ought not always to make choice of the leaſt?

To the other objection I anſwer, that where any Man openly appears to be wicked and ſcandalous in his life and converſation; By the Diſcipline of our Church, we are required to exclude ſuch a Perſon from the Holy Communion, until he gives good evidence of his repentance and reformation. But where nothing

nothing outwardly appears against a Man, who lives in the profession of the true Religion; what have we to do to enquire into the secrets of his Heart, for which he is accountable only to God? And if our Saviour Christ did not exclude even *Judas* himself from the Holy Communion, because, at that time, he had done nothing openly; altho' Christ well knew that he had made a private agreement with the chief Priest to betray him? Why should we take upon us to be more strict in this matter? Or who has given us any Authority so to be?

And thus have I examined, and I hope sufficiently Answered, all the Pretences which Men do ordinarily make for neglecting the Holy Communion. I have but this one thing to add, and I have done; namely, that as it is a great Sin to receive the Holy Communion unworthily, that is to say without true Repentance; so certainly is it no less a Sin, to slight and neglect that Ordinance, which Christ himself has expressly appointed and commanded, in remembrance of that Death and Passion which he underwent for us. Let us therefore take the matter into our serious consideration; and whil'st we are so very cautious to avoid the danger on the one hand, let us not be so foolish as to run our selves into as great a hazard on the other. For as he who presumed to come to the Nuptial Feast, without a *Weding Garment*, was severely punished for his Presumption, *Mat.* 22. 13. So they who neglected to come at all, and slighted the invitation which was given them, were accounted as unworthy Persons, and received their doom accordingly, *ver.* 7. 8.

A Brief Account of the End and Design of the Holy Communion, the Obligation to receive It, the Way to prepare for It; and the Behaviour of our selves both at, and after, It.

IN a former Discourse Entitled, *An Answer to all the Excuses and Pretences*, which *Men ordinarily make for their not coming to the Holy Communion*; I have endeavour'd to remove all those Obstacles, whether real, or pretended, which too many Men seemeth, either wholly to stop their way to God's Holy Table, or, at least, to render it very difficult and troublesome to be passed. If what I have therein said has had any influence upon the Minds of well meaning Men, so as to *incline* them, something more then formerly, to prepare themselves for the partaking of this Sacred Ordinance; I hope that what I am now about to offer, may both make them throughly sensible of the obligation which lies upon them thereto, and also sufficiently instruct them in every thing which is necessary, in the performance thereof, to render them Worthy receivers, and acceptable to Almighty God.

Five things there are which are very necessary to be understood by every one, who would be throughly instructed and directed in order to the receiving of the Holy Communion: Namely first, For what End and purpose this Ordinance was instituted and appointed? Secondly, What obligation lies upon every Christian to come and receive it? Thirdly, How

How often we all of us ought to partake of it? Fourthly, What preparation is neceſſary in order to it? And Laſtly, how we ought to behave our ſelves both at, and after, it? And altho' I have hinted many things in my former diſcourſe above mentioned, which might in ſome ſort ſerve for an anſwer to theſe enquiries; yet becauſe what there is ſpoken, which may relate to theſe particulars, is only occaſionally touched; and but juſt glanced at; I have thought it may not be improper a little more fully, and methodically, to handle them.

For the clearing of the firſt point propoſed, we muſt call to mind, what the holy Scripture ſo often declares to us; that our Bleſſed Saviour Jeſus *Chriſt dyed for us*; that we are *Juſtified by his Blood*, and *ſaved from wrath through him*? And, altho' *we were* once *Enemies*, are yet upon our true Repentance *reconciled* to God by *the death of his Son*, Rom. 5. 8, 9, 10. and thereby put into a Capacity of being made Eternally Happy in the Life to come. From whence it will follow that as, in the firſt place, it is the duty of every Chriſtian, always to be thankful for, and never to forget, or be unmindful of, ſo great a favour and benefit, vouchſafed and offered to us; ſo Secondly, except a Man have an Intereſt in the Death and Paſſion of Chriſt, and is made a partaker of the Merits of his Sufferings; and of that *Propitiation* which he thereby Made for the Sins of the World, 1 *Joh.* 2. 2. he can have no Juſt ground to hope for Everlaſting Salvation. That therefore both theſe ends might the more effectually be obtained: and that all Chriſtians might often, in a lively manner, be put in mind, and alſo, at the ſame time, be made partakers of the Merits of Chriſt's Death and Sufferings; this ſacred Ordinance was apointed by him, both as the Commemoration of his Paſſion and alſo the Communion of his Body and Blood.

Thus the Apoſtle Saint *Paul* tells us, what Three of the Evangeliſts have alſo recorded; That *The Lord Jeſus, the ſame Night in which he was Betrayed, took Bread; and, when he had given Thanks he brake it, ſaying, Take, Eat, this is my Body which is broken for you; this do in Remembrance, of me. After the ſame manner he took the Cup, when he had ſupped; ſaying, this Cup is the New Teſtament in my Blood; this do ye, as oft as ye Drink it, in Remembrance of me. For* (ſays the Apoſtle in the ſame place) *as often as ye Eat this Bread and Drink this Cup, ye do ſhew the Lords Death till he come,* 1 Cor. 11. 23. &c. And the ſame St. *Paul* tells us, in the Sixteenth Verſe of the foregoing Chapter, that the *Cup of Bleſſing which we bleſs, is the Communion of the Blood of Chriſt; and the Bread which we break the Communion of the Body of Chriſt*, From which paſſages of Scripture it is obvious to colect, why this divine Inſtitution is ordinarily called ſometimes the *Lord's Supper*, and ſometimes the *Holy Communion*.

Here then we have a full, and plain Anſwer, to the firſt thing propoſed to be handled: Namely, *For what end and purpoſe this ordinance was inſtituted and appointed?* It was appointed (as we may ſee) Firſt, to put us in Remembrance of the Death and Sufferings of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt: The breaking of the Bread being put to repreſent the Crucifixion of his Body; and the Wine his Blood, which was ſhed for us. And Secondly, that it might be to us not only the Commemoration, but alſo the *Communion* of the Body and Blood of Chriſt: that is to ſay, the means which God has ordained, by the uſe of which we do Communicate in the benefits of that Sacrifice which Chriſt offered, and in the Merits of that Death and Paſſion, which he underwent in his *Body*, and by the ſhedding of his Blood for us; As I have already ſaid in my former Diſcourſe.

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I come now to the Second thing propoſed to be enquired into; Namely, What obligation lies upon every Chriſtian to come and receive the Holy Communion.

And here in the firſt place what Obligation can be ſtronger than the plain and poſitive Command of our Saviour Chriſt himſelf? Which he has laid upon us in as expreſs terms as can be; that we ſhould *do this*; that is to ſay *Eat of this Bread and drink of this Cup, in Remembrance of him*; as we may find it in the words juſt now quoted, 1. Cor. 11. 23. &c. And that theſe words were ever underſtood to contain in them a ſtrict command perpetually binding all Chriſtians to the obſervation of it, moſt evidently appears, as well from the context of that Chapter (from the Twentieth Verſe to the end) as from the conſtant great care and concern which the Apoſtolick and Primitive Church always ſhewed, in the maintaining, and decent Celebration of this Ordinance.

But beſides the bare Authority of our Saviour Chriſt, which alone is ſufficient to lay an indiſpenſable Obligation upon us; there are ſome Collateral Circumſtances and Conſiderations which do add an extraordinary weight and force to this Command; as namely that it was given at that very time when he, who was our beſt Friend, and greateſt Benefactour, was juſt ready to dye and lay down his Life for our Sakes: and not only ſo, but this Command was given us to be obſerved in Remembrance of him and of that Death which he underwent for us.

If a dying *Friend* ſhould, before his departure out of the World, make any requeſt to me which were not impoſſible, or unreaſonable in it ſelf; I ſhould think my ſelf much wanting in that friendſhip which I had profeſſed to him, if I ſhould omit or neglect

to perform it. But if this Friend had been one, not of the common Sort, but a very great and extraordinary Benefactour to me; And if beyond this he were just going to lay down his Life for my Sake; and Lastly, if his request were that I would do something which might be a means to keep me always in *Remembrance* of him, and of what he had done for me; Certainly I might well be accouted as one of the most Barbarous and ungrateful Wretches that ever Lived, if I were not very careful most punctually to observe, and fulfil, whatever should thus be enjoined and laid upon me. Now beside the Authority which our Saviour Christ has to lay an obligation upon us; we all of us sure must acknowledge that he is our Friend, our greatest Friend, and chiefest Benefactour; and that it was for our Sakes alone that he underwent all his Sufferings, and yielded up his Life upon the Cross. And since he has made this request, and left it as a Command unto all who should believe in him: that they should Eat of this Bread, and Drink of this Cup, in Remembrance of him, and of what he had suffered for us; I would fain know how any Man, who calls himself a Christian, can possibly be excused from the greatest Ingratitude as well as Disobedience, if he neglects to do what he thus appears to be so strongly and doubly obliged to. And with what Confidence can he hope to be Saved by the Merits and Passion of Christ, whilst he refuses, or neglects, to Commemorate his Death and Sufferings, in that manner which Christ himself has appointed?

And thus I think we have a sufficient Answer to the Second thing proposed; Namely, what obligation lies upon every Christian to receive the Holy Communion. We are plainly obliged to do it First in point of *Duty*; because we are thereunto expressly commanded by Christ Jesus our Saviour: And Se-

Secondly in point of *Gratitude*; becauſe this Injunction was laid upon us by our beſt Friend and greateſt Benefactour, when he was juſt ready to lay down his Life for us, that it might ſerve as a means to keep up in his Church a *Lively Remembrance* of him and his great love to us for ever.

I proceed then to the Third thing propoſed to be handled, namely, how often we all of us ought to partake of the Holy Communion? The Anſwer to which Queſtion is briefly and plainly this, *viz.* that every Sincere Chriſtian is obliged to *partake of the Holy Communion as often as he has an Oportunity for it.* The truth of which aſſertion I think will appear beyond all manner of exception from theſe two following conſiderations.

Firſt, I ſuppoſe it will eaſily be granted that whoſoever is an Honeſt and *Sincere Chriſtian*, ought not to let ſlip any opportunity, that is fairly offered him of expreſſing his thankfulneſs to Almighty God, for that infinite mercy vouchſafed unto Mankind, in our Redemption by the Death and Paſſion of our Bleſſed Lord and Saviour. For he that is wanting in his thankfulneſs to God for ſo ineſtimable a benefit, thereby plainly demonſtrates that he is not throughly Sincere in his Chriſtianity; which indiſpenſibly obliges him to this Duty. Now that the devout Participation of the Holy Communion, is one very fit and proper way of expreſſing our thanks and acknowledgements to God for our Redemption, by the Sufferings and Death of Chriſt (for the thankful Commemoration whereof the very Ordinance was apointed) is ſo very plain, that no Man I think who owns the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, and is not miſled by Falſe and Enthuſiaſtick notions, can deny, or ſo much as doubt of it. From whence it muſt needs follow, that he who has a fair opportunity of Receiving the Holy Communion,

and yet neglects to partake of it, is deficient in the expreſſion of his thankfulneſs to God; And conſequently is not ſufficiently Sincere in that Chriſtianity which he profeſſes.

Secondly, Whoſoever has an opportunity offered him of doing a good Act, and has no juſt reaſon or excuſe for his not doing of it, is certainly bound and obliged to do it, according to the opportunity which is ſo offered. Now that to Participate of the Holy Communion is a good Act I have already ſhewn, in that I have proved it to be our Duty: And that there can be no ſuch thing as a juſt excuſe or reaſon for not partaking of it, I have proved at large in my former Diſcourſe; in which I have fully Anſwered all manner of pretences of this Nature. The conſequence then muſt be, that whoſoever has an opportunity of Receiving the Holy Communion, and yet neglects to receive it, is moſt evidently guilty of a failure in his Chriſtian Duty.

But here perhaps I ſhall be told that ſometimes, tis poſſible an opportunity for Receiving the Holy Communion may offer it ſelf, when a Man is not duly prepared for it, and therefore ought not to partake of it. To which I Anſwer, that he who is a Sincere Chriſtian ought never to be unprepared for this Holy Ordinance: Which will evidently appear from what I have to ſay upon.

The Fourth thing propoſed to be handled; Namely, what Preparation is neceſſary in order to the Receiving of the Holy Communion.

Now to this Holy Ordinance (and indeed to all Solemn acts of Devotion) a twofold preparation is neceſſary: Firſt a general, and Secondly a particular one. I call that *a general Preparation* which *always* ought to be making; and is not the Work of a few hours only, but ſhould be the main Buſineſs of every Man's whole Life. And that I call *a par-*

particular Preparation, which is then more eſpecially to be made, whenever we are upon thus approaching to God, and have a particular deſign of coming to his Holy Table.

The general preparation then which is neceſſary for every Man, that would come with acceptance to the Holy Communion; is Repentance for his paſt Sins, together with a vertuous and Holy Life; In all points agreeable unto the Laws of God (I mean to the beſt of his Power) And never *wilfully* or *habitually* ſtraying away from thoſe Rules and Precepts, which are preſcribed to us in the Goſpel. For he who, having not Repented of his Sins, but living ſtill in the *wilful* practice of any of them; or the *known* neglect of any Duty, ſhall offer to approach unto God in any act of Devotion whatſoever, is ſo far from doing a thing which is acceptable to him; that, on the contrary, God has expreſt the greateſt abhorrence that well can be unto all ſuch Worſhip or Service as this. *The Sacrifice of the Wicked is an abomination to the Lord*, Prov. 15. 8. And again, *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law, even his Prayer ſhall be abomination:* Chap. 28. 9. beſides a multitude of other Texts that might be quoted to the ſame purpoſe. And here we muſt ever remember what the Apoſtle Saint *James* tells us Chap. 2. 10. And what in it ſelf alſo is moſt highly rational; Namely that *Whoſoever ſhall keep* the whole Law and yet (wilfully) *offend in any one point* (And continue therein without Repentance is *guilty of all.* For (according to the Apoſtle's Reaſoning in the next Verſe) ſince the ſame God who forbids one Sin, has alſo forbiden all others: He who wilfully perſiſts in any one Sin, whatever it be; plainly deſpiſes the very Authority of God, and thereby, as much as in him lies, undermines the very Foundation of his whole Law.

I will

I will not then ſtand to diſpute how thoſe Words of Saint *Paul* are to be interpreted, that *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himſelf*, 1 Cor. 11. 29. But this I take to be as plain, both from Reaſon and Scripture, as ſuch a thing can be; That not only he who comes to the Holy Communion; but who dares to offer up his Prayers to God, while he *wilfully* perſiſts in any known Sin, or the neglect of any known Duty, is guilty of a very great affront to the Divine Majeſty. To come to the Marriage Feaſt without a *Wedding Garment*, was reſented as a high contempt of the King who made the Invitation, Matt. 22. 12, 13. And to *bow the knee* to Chriſt, and cry *Hail King of the Jews*, at the ſame time when they *Spit on him and Smote him on the Head*; was nothing but a redoubling of their *Mockery*, Matt. 27. 29, 30. And I appeal to the common Senſe of every Man, whether he is not guilty of the very ſame ſort of practice towards Almighty God, who bends his Knees, or ſhews outward Signs of reverence to him in Prayers, or at the Holy Communion; while his heart and affections are not truly bent to ſerve and obey him in all his Actions; but he, on the contrary, lives in an habitual violation of his Laws, and a continued contempt of his Power and Authority?

But beſides this which I call *a general Preparation*; there is alſo a more *particular Preparation*; which is very proper; and *ordinarily* neceſſary in order to the reception of the Holy Communion. Which the Apoſtle Saint *Paul* tells us is *Self Examination. Let a Man examine himſelf, and ſo let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup*, ſays he, 1 Cor. 11. 28. That is, in other terms, that whenever a Man deſigns to preſent himſelf at God's Holy Table, he ought before hand Seriouſly to call himſelf to an account, whether or no he be ſo qualified as to be acceptable

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to God when he comes there: That is to say, whether or no he really and truly has that general Preparation, of which I have been just now speaking; and without which he ought not to come. For if such an enquiry as this be not often and carefully made; the Filth and Pollution of Sin will, by little and little, in a manner almost insensibly, cleave again to our Souls; till by degrees it destroys and takes away that general preparation which ought always to be kept and maintained by us. Whilst we sometimes *Slumber or Sleep* our *Lamps* will be apt to Burn dim; and therefore must be new *Trimmed* at our going out to *meet the Bridegroom*. Matt. 25. 5, 6, 7. And when we have put on the *Wedding Garment*, Matt. 22. 12. It is yet very fit that as often as we come to the Marriage Feast, we should examine and take a careful view of our dress; for fear it should have contracted some spot or defilement.

But here perhaps it will be demanded: Is this all the Preparation that is necessary to the Receiving of the Holy Communion; That a Man should lead a virtuous and Christian Life; And not be conscious to himself (upon the examination of his Conscience) that he continues in any unrepented Sin? Is it not absolutely necessary that, upon *Every* such occasion as this, he should run through the whole Catalogue of Sins, and examine himself particularly upon every one of them, with all their Circumstances and Aggravations? And ought not he also for some days, before hand to sequester himself from all worldly business whatsoever, and to spend his time only in Prayer, Meditation, Reading, and such like Acts of Devotion.

That honest and lawful business is never to be reckoned as a hinderance from the Holy Communion, I have shewn in my former Discourse. And to the rest of what is here urged I Answer, That such

ſuch a ſtrict and particular examination of our Conſcience is undoubtedly ſometimes the Duty of every Man: For except we thus *ſearch and try our ways*; that we may clearly diſcern wherein we have gone aſtray, we ſhall not be able to *turn again to the* Lord, as we ought to do, *Lam.* 3. 40. Nor do I think that any time can be more proper and convenient for this; than when we are about to approach unto God's Table. That ſome ſuitable Prayers, and proper Medtiations alſo, ought to be uſed upon ſuch an occaſion as this (as indeed upon every particular occaſion whatſoever that is of any conſiderable moment) every Mans own reaſon muſt tell him is a part of his Chriſtian Duty. But that every time he receives the Holy Communion he ſhould thus nicely examin himſelf, if there be not ſome other particular reaſon for it; And that ſo much time extraordinary ſhould always beforehand be ſpent in Prayer and Meditation, more than at other ſeaſons; is what I can find no argument either from Reaſon or Scripture to prove neceſſary. It is beyond diſpute that the primitive Chriſtians did every Lords Day (if not oftner) receive the Holy Communion: And if they had thought themſelves obliged to ſpend ſo much time always in particular Preparation as ſome Men ſeem to think neceſſary; it would ſcarce have been poſſible for them to have had ſufficient leiſure from their Devotions, to have followed the buſineſs of their callings, to get a liveyhood for themſelves and their Families: And thoſe extraordinary long exerciſes of Prayer, Reading and Meditation, which ſome do require by way of preparation to this ordinance; As they do affright and keep away many from it, who find that they are not well able to go through with them: So is the performance of them ſuch a tireſome thing to others, that it often makes them heavy and unapt even for their ordinary De-

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votions for ſome time after they have Received the Holy Communion. And therefore for the Readers better ſatisfaction and direction, I have at the end of this Diſcourſe ſet down a few ſhort Rules how we ought always to prepare our ſelves for the Receiving of it.

I come now to the laſt Thing propoſed to be touched on: Namely, how we ought to behave our ſelves both at and after the Holy Communion? In which the very Nature and Deſign of the Ordinance it ſelf will be a moſt plain and clear Direction to us. For ſince the intent of it is not only a Solemn and Perpetual Commemoration of the Death of Chriſt; but alſo the Communion or Participation of the Merits of his Paſſion (as I have already ſhewn) It will follow, Firſt that at this Office, we ought to behave our ſelves with a ſuitable Seriouſneſs, Attention, and Reverence. And Secondly, that after it, we ought to return moſt humble Thanks to Almighty God, for the great Benefits which he is pleaſed to vouchſafe unto us by it. For our more particular Direction, wherein I have to this Diſcourſe ſubjoyned ſome ſhort Rules, Prayers and Meditations which I take to be proper to the Occaſion, and I hope may prove uſeful to thoſe of an ordinary Capacity; for whom this ſmall Work is chiefly Deſigned. To which therefore I refer the Reader without adding here any more upon this Point.

Brief

Brief Rules for Preparation, for the Holy Communion, and Behaviour, both At and after It; with ſhort Prayers and Meditations, ſuitable to that Occaſion.

Of General Preparation.

HE that would maintain and keep himſelf in a conſtant *general preparation* for the Holy Communion; ſo. as always to be fit, upon the ſhorteſt Notice, to partake of it (which certainly every Chriſtian ought ever to endeavour after) muſt be careful in the Obſervation of theſe following Rules.

1. He muſt be diligent in his Endeavours to Know and Underſtand all the ſeveral Parts and Branches of his Duty to God; to all other Men, and to himſelf. For which end he muſt be careful to make the beſt Uſe he can of all thoſe Means of Inſtruction and Knowledge which God has put into his Power: Such as reading the Holy Scriptures and other good Books, or hearing them read; Attending upon the publick Offices of Preaching, Catechiſing, and the like, *Prov.* 4. 5. *Joh.* 5. 39. 2 *Tim.* 3. 15. *Joh.* 13. 17.

2. He muſt upon all Occaſions, be Induſtrious and Zealous in the avoiding of every Sin, and the Practice and Performance of every Duty, according to his Ability and Opportunity for the ſame, *Tit.* 2. 11, 12, 13, 14. *Mat.* 7. 21. *Luk.* 12. 47.

3. He muſt every often Think and Meditate upon his Ways; and all his particular Practices; and examine whether or no they are agreable to the Rules of his Duty: That whereſoever he finds he has been deficient or done amiſs; he may take the beter care

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to Rectify and Amend it for the time to come, *Pſal.* 4. 4. and 119. 59. *Lam.* 3. 40.

For which end and purpoſe I recommend this following, eaſy, but very profitable, Task; which I would have every Man conſtantly to impoſe upon himſelf. Namely Two or Three times in the courſe of each Day to carry his Thoughts back; and ſeriouſly to conſider what he has that Day been doing, and how he has ſpent his Time from the very Minute that he firſt awakened from Sleep. As for Example, When firſt I awaked, did I think upon God, and recommend my ſelf to his Almighty Care and Protection? Or did not Worldly, or it may be ſinful Thoughts firſt take Poſſeſſion of my Heart? Again: I was lately in ſuch, or ſuch company: How, and after what Manner, did I behave my ſelf? Were all my Words and Actions Innocent, Modeſt, and Decent? Did I give no Offence to God, or Scandal to the World by any thing which there I either ſaid or did? *&c.* Such Queſtions as theſe if we would conſtantly and ſeriouſly put home to our Conſciences, while Things remain *freſh in our Memories*; It is evident what a mighty Influence it would have upon us, to reſtrain us from Evil, and excite us to do that which is Good.

Of particular Preparation.

1. Whenever Notice is given of the Celebration of the Holy Communion, Let every Sincere and Devout Chriſtian immediately reſolve by no Means to miſs that Opportunity of Commemorating the Sufferings, and Communicating in the Merits, of his bleſſed Lord and Saviour.

2. And in the midſt of all his Buſineſs (in the mean time) Let him very often call to Mind, that ſuch a Day he muſt not be abſent from God's holy Table; And therefore muſt be very careful not to do any Thing which may render him unfit for it.

3. At

3. At ſome Seaſons it is very neceſſary that every Man ſhould ſet a little time apart for the more ſtrict and particular Exmination of his Conſcience: For which end and purpoſe I earneſtly recommend that Catalogue of Sins which is drawn up at the end of that excellent Book, *The whole Duty of Man*, which I would have every Man very diſtinctly to go over; And upon every particular to recollect his Actions, and ask his Conſcience, have I been guilty of this?

4. But where a Man very often receives the Communion, and never miſſes any opportunity for it; I do not conceive that ſuch a particular Examination is every time abſolutely neceſſary: Nor have all Men at all times Leiſure enough for it. But however; Ordinarily, I think, no Man ought to receive the Holy Communion without ſome previous Examination of himſelf. For the more eaſy and regular Performance of which I would have it Remembred that the whole Duty of a Chriſtian is reducible to theſe Three Heads, *Mat.* 22. 37. *&c.*

1. To love God in the higheſt Degree.
2. Sincerely (and not corruptly or ſenſually) to love himſelf.
3. To love every Man with the ſame ſort of Love, (tho 'not in the ſame Degree) as he loves himſelf.

5. Every time then, that a Man receives the Holy Communion, I would have him, beforehand, ſeriouſly to put, at leaſt theſe, Three Queſtions home to his Conſcience.

1. Do I really and truly love God above all Things? and do I effectually ſhew this my love by a due Honour and Reſpect to him in all my Thoughts, Words, and Actions?
2. Have I a ſincere and upright Love for my ſelf? That is, do I love my Soul, better than my Body? And am I more heartily concerned to ſecure my ever-

everlasting Happiness in the World to come, than to compass my Pleasure or Profit in this Life?

3. Have I a real and sincere Love for all Mankind without exception? And do I effectually shew this my love by hurting no Man, by Word or Deed (where I can possibly avoid it) and by being ready to do Good to every Man whatsoever, in all Ways, and upon all Occasions, wherever I have Ability and Opportunity?

And if these Three Questions are but *seriously* Meditated upon *for a little time*; there is scarce any Sin that a Man has been guilty of, but they will point it out to him.

6. When a Man by the Examination of his Conscience, has set his Sins full in his View; then let him insert into his ordinary Devotions, this or some such like Confession of them to God.

O *Most Gracious God! I thy unworthy Creature, here humbly acknowledge my Sins before thee. And besides, those which I have now Recollected, I cannot but own that I lie under the Guilt of many more Transgressions; although I am not able to Recount or Remember them. Nor can I deny but that I have committed many Sins even contrary to the Motions of thy Grace, and the Light and Conviction of my own Conscience. And therefore do most justly deserve the severity of thy Wrath and Indignation against me. But Lord, I fly unto thee for Mercy. For the sake of Christ Jesus our most blessed Redeemer, be merciful to me in the Pardon of all my Sins, known and unknown: and so guide and assist me by thy Good Grace, that for the time to come, I may be duly careful to abstain from every Evil Thing; May grow in Grace, and be Zealous of Good Works, and maintain a Conscience void of Offence; towards God, and towards Men; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

To which let him add this ſhort Prayer.

MOſt Merciful God, who haſt given thine only Son Jeſus Chriſt to die for our Sins: Grant me thy Grace, I humbly beſeech thee, that I may never be unmindful, but always truly thankful for that ineſtimable Benefit vouchſafed unto me by his Death and Suffering: And ſo fit and prepare me, O Lord, by the aſſiſtance of thy Holy Spirit, that, both at this, and all other times, I may be rightly Qualified to commemorate the Paſſion of my Bleſſed Redeemer, in that holy Ordinance which he has appointed; and alſo thereby effectually to partake of that Redemption which he has wrought for all Mankind, Through the ſame Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

Of Behaviour, At and After, the Holy Communion.

1. At the holy Communion, and at all other times in the Worſhip of God, Let every Man ſtrive as much as he can, to keep his Mind intent and fixt upon what he is about: and to lay aſide not only all wicked Thoughts; but alſo all ſuch as are impertinent to the preſent Buſineſs.

2. Let him alſo take care to behave himſelf with that outward Decency and Compoſedneſs, as may be a ſufficent Token of that inward Devotion and Reverence, which he bears in his Heart; without gazing about, or any way unneceſſarily moving his Body, or whiſpering to any one that is near him, or the like.

3. While the ſervice is Performing let him all along Joyn with the Miniſter and Congregation with his Heart and Thoughts lifted up to God; and with his Tongue too, where the Liturgy requires that any Thing ſhould be ſpoken aloud by the People; As in the Reſponſes, the Confeſſion, the Lord's Prayer and the Doxology.

4. But

4. But let him take Care likewiſe to avoid all manner of Affectation; and not to behave himſelf in ſuch a manner as if he had a mind to be taken Notice of for a Perſon of extraordinary Devotion. For which Reaſon; Whatever private Prayers or Meditations he may have to Offer to God; Let him put them up in his Thoughts alone, and let not his Voice be heard, but when the publick Office requires it.

5. When he has received the Bread, let him Offer up This, or ſome ſuch ſhort Ejaculation to God.

O Good God! Grant that by the ſufferings of my dear Saviour, who was Crucified for me, I may eſcape eternal Sufferings, and be made partaker of everlaſting Glory.

And when he has recieved the Cup, let him in his Heart thus ſay,

O Gracious God! Grant that by the ſhedding of the Blood of thy dear Son, I may obtain the Remiſſion of all my Sins.

6. While the Bread and Wine are diſtributing to the reſt of the Congregation, let him entertain himſelf with ſuch ſort of Meditations and Prayers as theſe.

1. Let him again bethink himſelf what thoſe Sins are to which he has been moſt inclined: and let him in the preſence of God ſeriouſly and ſtedfaſtly renew his Reſolutions of being careful to abſtain from them for the time to come.

2. Let him alſo conſider what opportunities he ordinarily has for the doing of any Good Works; And let him ſtedfaſtly purpoſe ever hereafter to be Diligent in making uſe of them.

3. And let him hereunto add the following ſhort Prayer.

Merciful God aſſiſt me with thy Grace and holy Spirit, that I may always keep thoſe Vows and Good Reſolutions which thou haſt enabled me to make; that I may never

return to any of my former Sins: But ever hereafter ſerve thee faithfully in the conſtant Practice of Virtue and Religion, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, Amen.

4. And here let him expreſs his Charity by putting up a Prayer for all Mankind in this or the like Form.

Lord if it be thy Gracious Will extend thy Mercy and Compaſſion unto all Mankind. Inlighten the Minds of thoſe that are ignorant; And move the Wills of thoſe that are Obſtinate; that they may all receive thy holy Truth, and carefully live in the practice of it. Pardon all my Enemies O Lord: And bring them, and all of us all the World over, to true Repentance: that we may all live Holily and Righteouſly here; and may in the end be Happy with thee hereafter: Through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, Amen.

5. And then let him entertain himſelf with Reading and Meditating upon ſome ſelect Portions of the Holy Scripture, until ſuch time as the Miniſter is ready to proceed with the publick Office. I need not here Tranſcribe any particular Texts; but will leave every Man to make Choice of ſuch as are moſt agreeable to him, Only if he be at a loſs: Let him read the Hundred and Nineteenth Pſalm, where he ſhall eaſily find proper Matter enough to employ his devouteſt Thoughts upon this Occaſion.

6. When the Service is ended and the Congregation Diſmiſt; let him depart to his Home or Place of Abode. And as ſoon as he has a convenient Opportunity of retiring into ſome private Place: Let him firſt look back and conſider whether or no, in the Performance of this Holy Office which he has ſo lately been at, he has behaved himſelf in all Things as he ought to have done, And if he finds that he has been any way Short or Defective therein, let him reſolve to take better Care for the time to come.

7. And then let him conclude with this or the like Prayer.

Lord

Lord I desire to return my most humble and hearty thanks to thee for all thy Blessings both Spiritual and Temporal which thou hast vouchsafed to me. At this Time particularly I Praise and Bless thy Holy Name for that Opportunity which thou hast this Day given me of commemorating the Death and Passion of my blessed Redeemer, and also of partaking of his Merits, in the Participation of that Holy Ordinance which he has appointed. Lord pardon all the Weaknesses and Defects which I have been guilty of in the Performance of that great Duty. And assist me with thy Grace I beseech thee, that in the whole course of my Life, I may ever be careful to fulfil and perform those Vows ond Resolutions which I have made to thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

8. And last of all; Let him never, as long as he lives, be forgetful of what he has Thought, and Said, and Done, both before and at the Holy Communion. But let the Remembrance of it be a constant restraint upon him from all manner of Wickedness: And let him upon the assault of any Temptation, thus bethink himself.

At such a time I received the Holy Communion, and then I seriously Resolved, and solemnly promised to Almighty God, that I would heartily Endeavour in all Points to live like a Christian. Shall I then upon any Account Cheat, Lie, Curse, Swear, talk Profanely, or Obscenely or the like? No! God forbid. I have engaged my self to God, to be another sort of a Man: And what can I expect but Wrath and Indignation from him, if knowingly and wilfully I should Violate those Promises which I so Deliberately and Stedfastly made to him.

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